

Teaching *Mrs. Dalloway* I'm Thinking

How I'd like to buy flowers, how I'd like to place a sterling
silver bowl of peonies or cut-glass vase of tulips and irises
on the laminate seminar table in this windowless room,
and I'm thinking how I'd like to arrive before the one student
always a half hour early, how I'd like to greet each of them
at the door, inquire after their sisters and cousins, their *tíos*
and *abuelitas*, and comfort the one who's been fired
from his job. Every Tuesday another novel about the modern
condition, those catchy phrases we use: "alienation
and fragmentation"—while for the past three weeks Jill,
the debate team captain on two scholarships, hasn't said
a word because, she told me sobbing at the break, her boyfriend
was found bloody in his apartment, shot by her brother
off his meds, and Angie, dispatching for Pleasure U Hot Line,
her shift moved to graveyard, slumps dozing
in her chair. Now Jeffrey is saying, "She's snobbish, Clarissa,
I don't like her, who cares about her maids and
her flowers, but she's right, I mean, she gets it, nothing like
a great party." It's the dinner hour, though no bells chime
on this campus, and only two of us have actually heard Big Ben,
have ever strolled through Regent's Park, ridden on
a red double-decker. But nobody around this table wonders
why Septimus hurls himself out the window, nobody
needs PTSD explained, and when Marita asks, "Wasn't it Woolf
who filled her pockets with stones and walked into
a river?" nobody says, "Weird," as two dozen heads bend over
pages littered with Post-its. I'm thinking how I want
to say something, mend this rent in the air the way Clarissa
gathers the raveled threads of her ripped dress with her needle,
the way she draws everyone into her party, but already it's time
to pack up our pens, our notebooks, head out on the crowded

interstate, past all the newly constructed buildings with no
balconies, no wrought iron railings, these multiple stories
of steel and glass, mirrored so no one can see into them.

Contributors

WENDY BARKER has published four books of poetry. Her fifth, a novel in prose poems, *Nothing Between Us: The Berkeley Years*, is forthcoming from Del Sol Press; and a chapbook, *Things of the Weather*, is forthcoming from Pudding House Publications. New poems have recently appeared in or are forthcoming from journals, such as *The Georgia Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, and *Mid-American Review*. Recipient of National Endowment for the Arts and Rockefeller fellowships, she is poet-in-residence at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

RICK BASS is the author of twenty-four books of fiction and nonfiction, including *The Wild Marsh: Four Seasons at Home in Montana*, to be published by Houghton Mifflin/Harcourt in July. He lives in Montana with his wife and daughters.

JOHN BENSKO's books of poetry include *Green Soldiers* (1981), *The Waterman's Children* (1994), *The Iron City* (2000), and *Sea Dogs* (2004). He and his wife, fiction writer Cary Holladay, teach in the MFA program at the University of Memphis.

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FLEDA BROWN won the Felix Pollak Prize for *Reunion* (2007). She is the author of five other poetry collections and has a book of memoir essays, *Driving with*

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